



**How and Why We Work:  
Child Workers in the Informal Economy  
In  
Phnom Penh and Battambang**

**World Vision Cambodia  
Combating the Worst Forms of Child Labor Project  
Peace and Justice Programme**

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## **FOREWARD**

While it is well-recognized that the “worst forms of child labor” are pervasive throughout Cambodia, the full dimension of urban child labor remains elusive, in part because of the wide range of implicated sectors (both formal and informal), the broad geographic reach and disparities depending on location, the hidden nature of particular forms of labor, i.e., domestic labor, illegal drug trafficking, underground commercial sexual exploitation, etc., the fluidity of child labor trends and patterns, and the scarcity of up-to-date comprehensive data on child labor in Cambodia.

There is limited and fragmented data on the worst forms of urban child labor in major cities throughout Cambodia. Moreover, the linkages between street children, trafficking, sex tourism, and urban child labor has not heretofore been thoroughly examined and documented.

The following is the result of three months of research to assess the worst forms of urban child labor in Phnom Penh and Battambang. Research findings will help advance the knowledge base on urban child labor and further inform development of innovative action programmes that target the most vulnerable urban child laborers.

## ACRONYMS

<b>ADP</b>	Area Development Program
<b>CNCC</b>	Cambodian National Council for Children
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CWCLP</b>	Combating Worst Forms of Child Labor Project
<b>EOB</b>	Operation Enfants de Battambang
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IPEC</b>	International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>LICADHO</b>	Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
<b>MoLVT</b>	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
<b>MoSALVY</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NIS</b>	National Institute of Statistics
<b>PSE</b>	Pour un Sourire d’Enfant
<b>RGC</b>	Royal Government of Cambodia
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>VCAO</b>	Vulnerable Children Assistance Organization
<b>VDC</b>	Village Development Committee
<b>WVC</b>	World Vision Cambodia

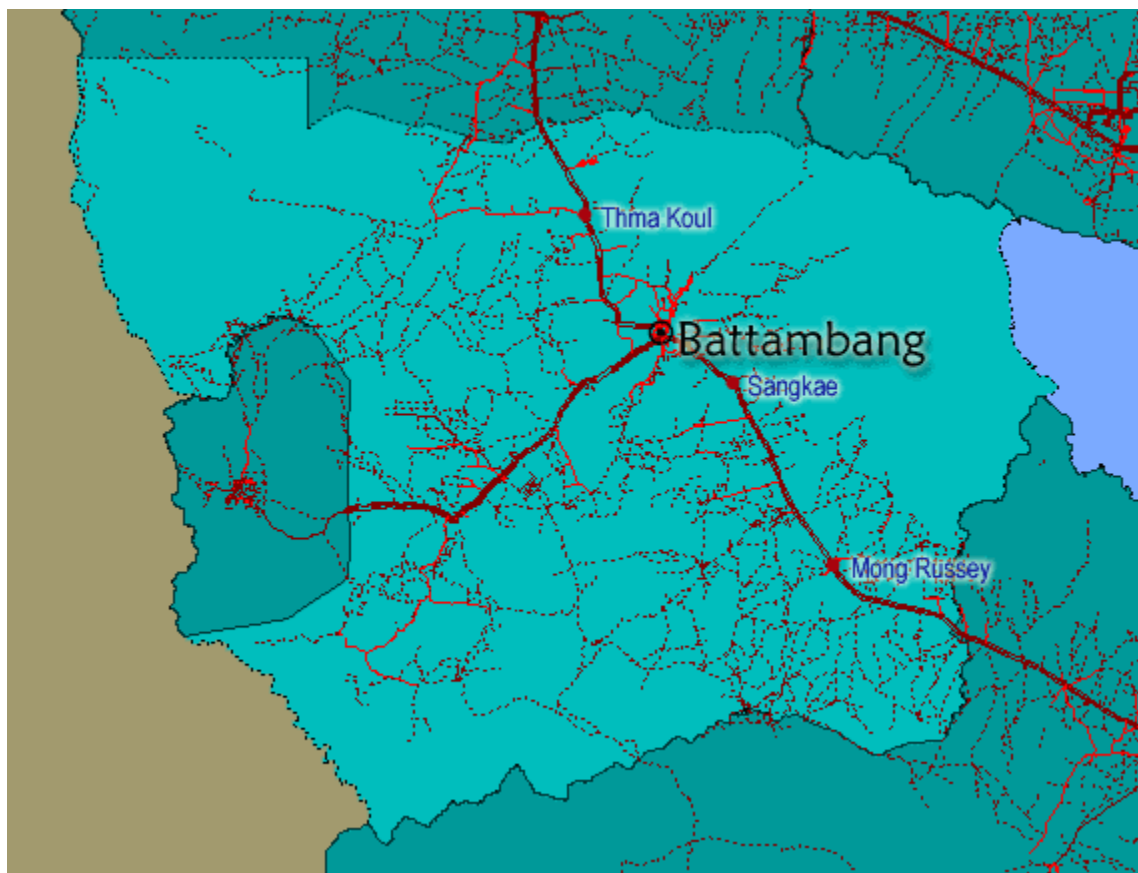
## Map of Cambodia



# Map of Phnom Penh



## Map of Battambang





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# INTRODUCTION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Combating Worst Forms of Child Labor Project, Peace and Justice Programme (World Vision Cambodia) commissioned this research on urban child labor to assess the scope, magnitude, dynamics, and impact of the worst forms of urban child labor in Phnom Penh and Battambang.

The research was conducted from June to August 2005. We interviewed 102 children between age 5 to 18 working as scavengers (collecting recyclables on the streets and at the dump site), beggars, day laborers, anchovies (prahok) cleaners, construction workers, and vendors of knick-knacks. We asked the child workers about their family background, education level, working conditions, amounts of money earned, reasons for working, working hours, sufficiency of food, and safety of work environment in order to understand the conditions and needs of child workers.

For Phnom Penh, we found that 68% of the children working are between 13 – 16 years old; 53% of child workers are female and 47% are male; 26% of the child workers never attended school and are illiterate; of those who had attended school, only 15% completed primary education; and 66% of the child workers are currently working full-time and not attending any form of schooling at all.

Sixty-four per cent of the interviewees have been working at their current jobs for two years or less; full-time scavengers earn R6,000 per day (US\$1.50), domestic workers earn between R1,000 to R2,000 per day (US\$.25 to US\$.50) in addition to food and accommodation. The beggars and those selling guidebooks, postcards, newspapers and knick-knacks to tourists are the highest earners (R10,000 to R20,000 per day) (US\$2.50 to US\$5.00); full-time scavengers are the second highest earners (R6,000 per day); and the ice cream and food vendors are the third highest earners (R5,000 per day) (US\$1.25).

For Battambang, we found that 67% of the children working are between 13 – 16 years old; 43% of child workers are female and 57% are male; 20% of the child workers never attended school and are illiterate; of those who had attended school, only 13% completed primary education; and 70% of the child workers are currently working full-time and not attending any form of schooling at all.

For Battambang, the street and dump site scavengers are the highest earners (R10,000 to R20,000 per day) (US\$2.50 to US\$5.00); the lowest earners are the day laborers (R2,000 per day) (US\$.50), with the potential to earn up to R10,000 per day (US\$2.50) by working from 7 AM to midnight during the busy season.

We believe that scavenging at the dump site is the “worst form of child labor” because the fume and extremely unsanitary and toxic conditions at the dump site have caused obvious skin disease on the child workers and may have caused other not-yet-visible health injuries. Children work at the dump site 12 hours per day, 7 days per week, are not attending school and the dangerous work conditions and long hours jeopardize the health, safety and moral development of the child as provided in ILO Convention 182.

Although the work performed by child beggars, brick factory workers, anchovies cleaners, vendors and domestic workers interviewed for this research is not exploitive and abusive on its face as they are allowed time to rest, are not forced to perform strenuous tasks beyond their physical abilities, and the immediate and serious threats to health and moral development are often low for most working children. The negative effects are more related to the long-term impact of work due to the children's lack of access to education and inability to break out of cycle of poverty.

Child domestic workers work alone in environments isolated from their families, peers and society. Although the work may not be strenuous and they are receiving shelter and enough food, the domestic workers live in fear, tension, anxiety and exhaustion and need assistance with literacy training, skills training to prepare them for other occupations. The current practice by employers of allowing child domestic workers to visit their families in the rural provinces only once or twice a year is tantamount to confinement, slavery and emotional abuse, all of which are violations of human rights as protected by international law.

There are many NGOs working to serve the needs of children, however, with the exception of ILO/IPEC's Time-Bound Program, we do not believe that any organization is working to combat the worst forms of child labor. Child laborers work to meet day-to-day emergency to survive, and there remains the critical need to train and develop marketable skills that will break them from the poverty cycle. Assistance to address family basic needs is necessary in order to prevent exploitation of the children.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **To Government**

Education is one of the important socio-economic factors that influence a person's behavior, social outlook and help define a person's role in society. In general, the attainment of higher education increases a person's chance of obtaining higher-paying employment, increases the chance of a person becoming an informed and contributing member of society, and increases the chance of a person becoming a good leader in his or her community.

As such, education can be one of the solutions in combating the worst forms of child labor. Children can be effectively removed from the labor force by government enforcement of mandatory universal education. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia provides that "The State shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools." (Article 68) Compulsory primary and secondary education means mandatory school attendance for children age 6 to 14. If this is strictly enforced with fines and penalties imposed on parents and guardians who keep children out of school, Cambodian children up to age 14 would be given the opportunity to attain basic education and be kept away from exploitative work situations.

Thirty-four per cent of the working children in Phnom Penh are attending school on a part-time basis while 30% of working children in Battambang are attending school on a

part-time basis. We believe that if children were required to be in school, they would not be able to work, would be less vulnerable to out-of-school and future worst forms of child labor, and would be acquiring skills and knowledge for a better future.

### **To NGOs**

Awareness-raising on child's rights and prohibitions against employing child labor has been successful, as evidenced by the many children we met who could recite their rights under Cambodian law and international conventions, and as evidenced by owners of restaurants and motorbike/car wash establishments in Phnom Penh who vehemently and defensively asserted their innocence in not employing child labor.

To serve the needs of child workers, work remains to be done in establishing training centers where child workers can acquire literacy, professional and social skills. Education on hygiene, preventative healthcare, work protective gear and financial management can tremendously improve the current situation and future outlook for the child workers



*Cambodian children*

and their families. Education, skills training and free healthcare for child workers are the two important needs that can be met by NGOs by expanding the scope of their existing programs to include children workers.

To end the worst forms of child labor, work remains to be done in poverty alleviation, assistance with food security and income generation for families to end their reliance on the child worker's earnings and financial contributions. For example, we met former child workers who used to scavenge at the Stung Meanchey dump site but stopped scavenging and changed to less dangerous work after their families were able to obtain loan capital to operate vegetable stalls.

The hardship and abuse endured in isolation by child domestic workers (both male and female) need programs where they can safely seek assistance and where can learn skills for other professions. The abused and long-term victims require counseling and rehabilitation to restore their physical and emotional health.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR IN CAMBODIA**

According to estimates for Year 2005, Cambodia's population is 13,607,069; 37.3% of the population is between 0 - 14 years old (male 2,559,734/female 2,510,235) and 59.7% of the population is between 15 - 64 years old (male 3,887,642/female 4,232,313). The literacy rate amongst adults and children age 15 and above is 80.8% for male and 59.3% for female. Forty per cent of the population is living in poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Cambodia's total employment for Year 2002 was 6.4 million, with the agriculture sector accounting for approximately 70% of employment, industry for 10.5% and services for 19.5%.<sup>2</sup> For Year 2001, approximately 1,516,363 children (44.8%) age 5 - 14 were "working children,"<sup>3</sup> and 54% of these working children were involved in agricultural work.<sup>4</sup> In Phnom Penh alone, it is estimated that 27,950 children were working as domestic workers in Year 2003.<sup>5</sup>

As in other developing countries, children in Cambodia are expected to contribute to the family unit. Cambodian social norms and attitudes idealize a child who contributes to improving the household by performing unpaid household chores, or who contributes to improving the family living standards or family survival by performing paid work. Even with this cultural and social predisposition, we met Cambodian adults who view child laborers working to help their families eke out a living, foregoing an education and performing tasks that endanger their physical and mental development, as beyond the parameters of an ideal childhood situation.

International Labour Organization/International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour ("ILO/IPEC") has identified the following work performed by children in Cambodia as the worst forms of child labor: 1) work in brick factories, 2) on commercial rubber plantations, 3) in salt production, 4) in fish processing, 5) portering in border towns such as Poipet, and 6) domestic work in Phnom Penh.

Although not included on the ILO/IPEC's list of worst forms of child labor, experts on child labor in Cambodia believe that child prostitution, child pornography, begging, scrap collecting, and the trafficking of Cambodian children into neighboring countries such as Thailand and Malaysia for exploitative labor are other visible worst forms of child labor in Cambodia.

### **INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS**

United Nations Children's Fund ("UNICEF") estimates that approximately 246 million children are working. Of these, 171 million (70%) "work in hazardous situations or

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<sup>1</sup> CIA World Fact Book <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cb.html#People>.

<sup>2</sup> Cambodian Statistical Year Book for 2003, cited by IFC/MPDF in "Business Update for Cambodia."

<sup>3</sup> Cambodia Child Labour Survey Report 2001, Section 5.1.2.

<sup>4</sup> Support Conventions 138 and 182 pamphlet, ILO/IPEC MOSALVY.

<sup>5</sup> Child Domestic Worker Survey, Phnom Penh—2003, National Institute of Statistics and ILO, March 2004.

conditions, such as working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, laboring behind the walls of workshops, hidden from view in plantations.”<sup>6</sup>

According to UNICEF, work performed by children can be divided into three categories. “Child work” is defined as the participation of children between age 12 to 18 in economic activity (light work) that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with their education. “Child labor” is more narrowly defined and refers to children below 12 years of age working in economic activities, and those between 12 to 14 years old engaged in harmful work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labor. The “worst forms of child labor” involve “children being enslaved, forcibly recruited, prostituted, trafficked, forced into illegal activities and exposed to hazardous work.”<sup>7</sup>

### **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

The Government of Cambodia has been active and is working to improve the conditions of children, as indicated by its commitment to increase school enrollment and retention in the country’s Millennium Development Goals, as well as in the country’s adoption and ratification of numerous international conventions and instruments relating to the protection of children.

As early as October 15, 1992, the Supreme National Council of Cambodia (name of the interim government at the time) ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (“CRC”) and on February 24, 1993, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, as President of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia, signed the Declaration of the World Summit for Children.

On November 20, 1995, the Cambodian National Council for Children (“CNCC”) was created to coordinate, monitor and evaluate the country’s implementation of the CRC and national programs relating to the development and protection of Cambodian children. The CNCC is also tasked with overseeing the coordination and implementation of the country’s National Program of Action for Children and ensuring that it is in accordance with the commitments of the CRC. The National Plan of Action for Children identifies plans for children as developed by government departments and ensures that all plans converge within the framework provided by the CRC and the goals of the 1990 World Summit for Children.

The CNCC is also responsible for the country’s program against trafficking in women and children. The Second Five-Year National Plan Against Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Exploitation (2005-2009) will include a special program against child labor and child sex tourism. Experts working to develop programs for children in Cambodia believe that the CNCC will need government and donor support to develop staff capacity,

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html).

independence, and the credibility necessary to effectively galvanize support for programs to protect children.

The Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (“MoLVT”) created a Child Labour Unit to monitor the conditions of working children in Cambodia. In conjunction with ILO/IPEC, the MoLVT has also developed a draft of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2004-2010) and has submitted it to the Council of Ministers for approval (at the writing of this report).

In anticipation of the Royal Government of Cambodia’s (“RGC”) ratification of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, ILO/IPEC, with support from the U.S. Department of Labor, began its four-year Time-Bound Program in April 2005 to immediately eradicate the worst forms of child labor in Cambodia. ILO/IPEC will work directly with national and provincial government departments, employers’ associations and employees’ associations (trade unions) to end children working on rubber plantations, salt fields, brick factories, porting, fishing, and child domestic work.

ILO/IPEC anticipates the creation of employees’ associations in brick factories, rubber plantations and salt fields to begin dialogues between employers and employees on issues such as working conditions, salaries, paid time off, and other labor-related issues. With the establishment of employees’ associations, it is anticipated that workers’ needs will be heard and constructive labor policies can be implemented to improve working conditions for workers in these industries.

ILO/IPEC will also provide funding to local non-governmental organizations



*Children at work at the dump site.*

(“NGOs”) such as Vulnerable Children Assistance Organization (“VCAO”) to work on prevention of violence and abuse against child domestic workers and to Women Development Association to conduct training on strengthening community-based structures and prevention of child domestic worker abuse.

## **COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

At the community level, a significant number of NGOs are currently working to address the dire health, economic, social and legal situations of children in Cambodia. Some of the significant organizations we met with include: World Vision Cambodia, CARE International, World Education, Save the Children Norway, International Organization for Migration (“IOM”), Mith Samlanh/Friends, VCAO, Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (“LICADHO”), Ptea Teung Dong and Operation Enfants de Battambang (“OEB”).

Although these organizations work to serve the needs of children, none of them are working directly to combat the worst forms of child labor. For example,

- IOM assists in repatriation and re-integration of child beggars who have been trafficked to Thailand;
- World Education’s OPTION program utilizes government officials as teachers in its education programs to prevent trafficking in source provinces;
- LICADHO provides education and awareness-raising on children’s rights, receives and investigates children’s rights violations, provides advocacy and has child protection networks at the grassroots level;
- Mith Samlanh/Friends has a transitional home, safe migration program in Phnom Penh and Kampong Cham, support and outreach for children, and child’s rights programs;
- CARE International utilizes educational programs to keep children away from labor;
- Ptea Teung Dong in Battambang provides shelter, vocational training and re-integration assistance to homeless families with children; and
- OEB assists disabled children with education and life skills training.

ILO/IPEC is the only organization working directly to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in Cambodia. Although VCAO is serving the needs of child workers by providing literacy, hairdressing, cooking and sewing classes to child domestic workers, it is not working directly to combat the worst forms of child labor as ILO/IPEC is proposing to do.

## **PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH**

This research aims to assess the scope, magnitude, dynamics, and impact of the worst forms of urban child labor in various sectors in Phnom Penh and Battambang. The research results will be used to formulate programmatic interventions and solutions to address the most urgent problems identified. Programs to empower communities and child workers to counter the worst forms of child labor and develop greater protection for



vulnerable child workers will be developed. The research results will also be utilized to develop hard-hitting advocacy tools to influence appropriate policy and legal reforms at the local, national, and regional levels.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF POPULATION**

Most child workers have no or limited education and work from dawn to dusk, foregoing an education and any opportunity of improving their future employment opportunities. Garbage scavengers, day laborers and anchovies cleaners work in terrible smelling environments filled with chemicals and toxic fume. In urban child labor, brick factories are perennial employers of child workers whereas the agriculture and fishing industries employ children only during busy seasons.

Although most child workers still appear healthy in their youth, the damage from working in toxic and hazardous environments to their physical health may not be seen until later years. It is not certain if the children themselves or their parents are aware of the potential health damage from the tasks the children are currently performing. Child workers give all money earned to their parents or guardians for food and family upkeep. The families of child workers are generally poor and are usually in debt for borrowing to cover food shortages, medical or family emergencies. The amount and causes of family debts are not the subject of this research.

In Phnom Penh, children engaged in the worst forms of child labor are generally migrants from rural provinces experiencing drought or poor agricultural production. The child workers migrate with their parents and siblings, or with an extended family member (uncles, aunts, cousins or guardian). Child workers work as scavengers collecting recyclables and scraps on the streets, at markets or at the Stung Meanchey dump site; they work as vendors of food, flowers, ice cream, newspapers, tour guidebooks and knick-knacks; and others work as beggars, construction workers, and domestic workers.

In Battambang, children engaged in the worst forms of child labor are generally not migrants from other provinces but are from rural districts of Battambang province. The child workers work as scavengers collecting recyclables and scraps at markets or at the dump site; they work as street sweepers, day laborers, anchovies cleaners; and others work at motorbike and car wash establishments, brick factories, and at homes and shops as domestic workers.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Due to various interpretations and connotations of terminologies relating to child labor, we must clarify usage of key terms within this report.

#### **Definition of a Child**

ILO Convention 138, ratified by the RGC on August 23, 1999 requires that the minimum age requirement for employment shall not be less than 15 unless the country's economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed, in which case, the minimum age for employment can be lowered to 14. However, for employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons, the minimum age shall not be less than 18 years.

Cambodian laws provide three definitions of “a child.” The Labour Law (1997) provides that the minimum age of employment is 15, however children between 12 and 15 can engage in light work provided that: a) the work is not hazardous to their health and psychological development; and b) the work will not affect their school attendance or their participation in vocational training programs approved by competent authorities.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Law on Marriage and Family (1989) provides that the minimum age for marriage for male is 20 and the minimum age for marriage for female is 18.<sup>9</sup> The Law on Contract and Other Liabilities (1988) requires that an individual be at least 18 years old in order to enter into legally enforceable contracts.

The CRC defines children as all human beings under the age of 18, unless the relevant national laws recognize an earlier age of majority.<sup>10</sup> This report follows the CRC definition of “a child.”



*Cambodian children.*

### **Definition of “worst forms of child labor”**

ILO Convention 182 defines the “worst forms of child labor” as:

- (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;

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<sup>8</sup> Labour Law of Cambodia (1997), Article 177.

<sup>9</sup> Law on Marriage and Family of Cambodia (1989), Article 5.

<sup>10</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1.

- (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and
- (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

At the writing of this report, there is no more use of children in armed conflict because the country's civil conflicts ended in 1996. Data and information on the use of children in pornography and drug trafficking are limited and thus gravity of the abuse is unknown while the use of children in commercial sex and exploitive labor is prevalent and visible in all areas of the country and all aspects of Cambodian life.

The RGC has not yet developed any list of work performed by children deemed to be the worst forms of child labor. However, the ILO/IPEC, working with the MoLVT (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training), has identified six areas of work performed by children as the worst forms of child labor. The six categories are: work in brick factories, on commercial rubber plantations, in salt production, in fish processing, portering in border towns such as Poipet, and domestic work in Phnom Penh.

For practitioners, specialists and advocates working on child labor issues in Cambodia, work performed by children is divided into three categories: 1) "worst forms of child labor", 2) hazardous child labor, and 3) semi-hazardous child labor.

"Worst forms of child labor" involve sexual and illegal activities, work that is forced or bonded, and work involving risk of death or long-term injuries (injuries requiring mandatory attention from a physician). "Hazardous child labor" is work that is full-time, takes children out of school, and work that may lead to serious injuries requiring medical treatment. "Semi-hazardous child labor" on the other hand, involves part- or full-time work that interferes with the child's schooling and work that may lead to minor injuries that heal quickly without the need for medical attention. All three categories of child labor violate the child's rights to protection, survival, development and participation as provided under the CRC.

However, according to the practitioners' definition of "worst forms of child labor", work that merely deprives a child of his educational opportunities does not qualify as worst forms of child labor. Scavenging, begging, domestic work and labor examined in this report do not constitute worst forms of child labor (as long as they do not involve physical abuse or sexual abuse/activities) because they do not involve risk of death or long-term injuries.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The categorization is attributable to Steve Gourley, Child's Rights Consultant, LICADHO, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

While we are cognizant and respectful of practitioners' working definition of "worst forms of child labor" as stated above, this report will follow ILO Convention 182's definition of "worst forms of child labor."

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND RATIONALE OF METHODOLOGY

Our research survey covered the urban areas of Phnom Penh and Battambang and involved 102 children workers randomly selected. We conducted individual interviews with 46 child workers in Battambang and with 56 child workers in Phnom Penh. Each interview was 10-15 minutes in length and was conducted in public areas. The interviewee was moved away from the crowd of family or friends in order to provide as much privacy as possible. However, we were not able to ensure total privacy, due to the persistent presence of the child workers' friends, family or neighbors who were curious and insistent on hearing or contributing information to the interview. The survey results are kept confidential.

We focused on Phnom Penh and Battambang because prior data shows that Phnom Penh has a high number of children involved in the worst forms of child labor and that Battambang may also have children involved in the worst forms of child labor and may be underserved by NGOs.

We traveled to market areas, public and recreational spots along the riverfront, construction sites, and locations we believed child laborers would be found. With the exception of the World Vision Area Development Program ("ADP") in Stung Meanchey and VCAO's training centers, we did not interview child workers who are already beneficiaries/participants in NGO activities. We believed that a random selection of child workers at work would produce a more accurate and fair representation of working children, rather than restricting or focusing interviews on those already at NGO centers.

At brick factories, motorbike/car wash establishments, gas stations and restaurants where child workers are under direct supervision of business owners or managers, we sought permission from the owners or managers before speaking to the child workers. The child workers were generally afraid or refused to speak to us without permission from the

owners or managers. We explained our research goals and purpose and informed the business owners, managers and interviewees that we would not record names or information that would identify the



interviewee or the business.

At a brick factory in Battambang, the manager had briefed the child workers before they met with us and thus we believe that the child workers were instructed to respond with certain answers. We were denied access to businesses in Phnom Penh such as a motorbike/car wash establishment on Pasteur Street near the Central Market which appears to have approximately 30 child workers working on the premises.

The questionnaire focused on characteristics such as the child workers' family background, daily work conditions, wages, education and health, security and sufficiency of food, recruitment and work experiences, history of injuries, encounters with authorities and gangs, sources of assistance and contacts with NGOs.

The length and nature of the child worker's contacts with NGOs are important because we would like to assess how and the extent to which NGO contacts and assistance affect a child worker's health and living conditions, as compared to child workers without NGO contacts and assistance.

In order to determine the safety and security of the child worker's work environment, we asked interviewees about the number and nature of their encounters with the police, village leaders, other figures of authority, gangs and big brothers. We also asked how long each child worker had been working in order to determine if the engaged work is a temporary solution to an emergency or if it is permanent employment.

## **DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS**

Field work in Battambang was conducted over a period of six days in June 2005 and field work in Phnom Penh was conducted over a period of two weeks in July 2005. In Phnom Penh, the Consultant and one World Vision staff conducted interviews whereas for Battambang, the Consultant and two World Vision staff conducted the interviews. Interviewees were randomly selected and all interviews were conducted in Khmer without the need of a translator or interpreter.

Data collection was carried out through visits to market areas, dump sites, brick factories, construction sites and locations where child workers were at work. The Consultant manually coded, edited and analyzed the completed questionnaires.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of Interviewees</b>
Phnom Penh	56
Battambang	46

For Battambang, in addition to interviewing child workers in the city center, we visited the rural districts of Banan, Samlaut and Rattanak Mondol in order to assess the prevalence of child labor in these communities and the extent to which these communities were the source of child labor. We found only one interviewee in Banan District that fit our interviewee profile and learned that the number of children involved in the worst forms of child labor in these rural communities is small and limited. During the rice planting or harvest season, children may assist their parents with farming activities but there are no businesses, industries or factories to perennially employ the children.

The villagers, village chiefs, members of the Village Development Committee (“VDC”), and community leaders in Banan, Samlaut and Rattanak Mondol told us that child laborers are non-existent in the community because child workers migrate and seek work in Poipet. We visited Poipet to verify this information and found that the number of child workers from Battambang province in Poipet at the time of our visit was small.

We also interviewed management and staff of NGOs to assess the work and activities currently combating the worst forms of child labor in Cambodia. We spoke with parents, villagers, village chiefs, members of the VDC, and community leaders familiar with activities of children working in their communities, in order to assess the working activities of children.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS**

This is a survey on working children who are in dire and precarious situations, and some of whom have been toughened by hardship and the struggle to survive. Although we informed all interviewees that their identification would remain anonymous, we still believe that the surveys contain the following technical and practical limitations:

- Interviewees in Phnom Penh may have underestimated their daily earnings in hope of generating sympathy and obtaining assistance from the interviewers;
- We were not able to interview child domestic workers in Battambang due to our inability to obtain access and permission from homeowners;
- We were not able to interview child workers in Phnom Penh’s restaurants and motorbike/car wash establishments due to our inability to obtain access and permission from business owners and managers;
- We did not interview child workers in the sex industry because commercial child sex is a specialized field requiring specialized research methodology;
- Domestic laborers interviewed were beneficiaries of a significant NGO intervention by VCAO, and this may represent more enlightened or committed employers than the average situation;

- Child workers at the brick factory were frightened and were instructed how to answer our questions by the manager and thus the answers may not accurately reflect the child laborers' conditions;
- There may be "hidden" child laborers which were not reached by this study, since this study focused on child laborers more easily accessible;
- We did not ask interviewees about sexual abuse in their work environment or personal life because sexual abuse is a highly sensitive matter requiring specialized research methodology; and
- The survey results are for Phnom Penh municipality and for Battambang only and may not be generalized for other urban areas of Cambodia. Further and specialized research is necessary in order to understand the overall dynamics and incidence of worst forms of child labor in Cambodia.



# URBAN CHILD LABOR

## INTRODUCTION

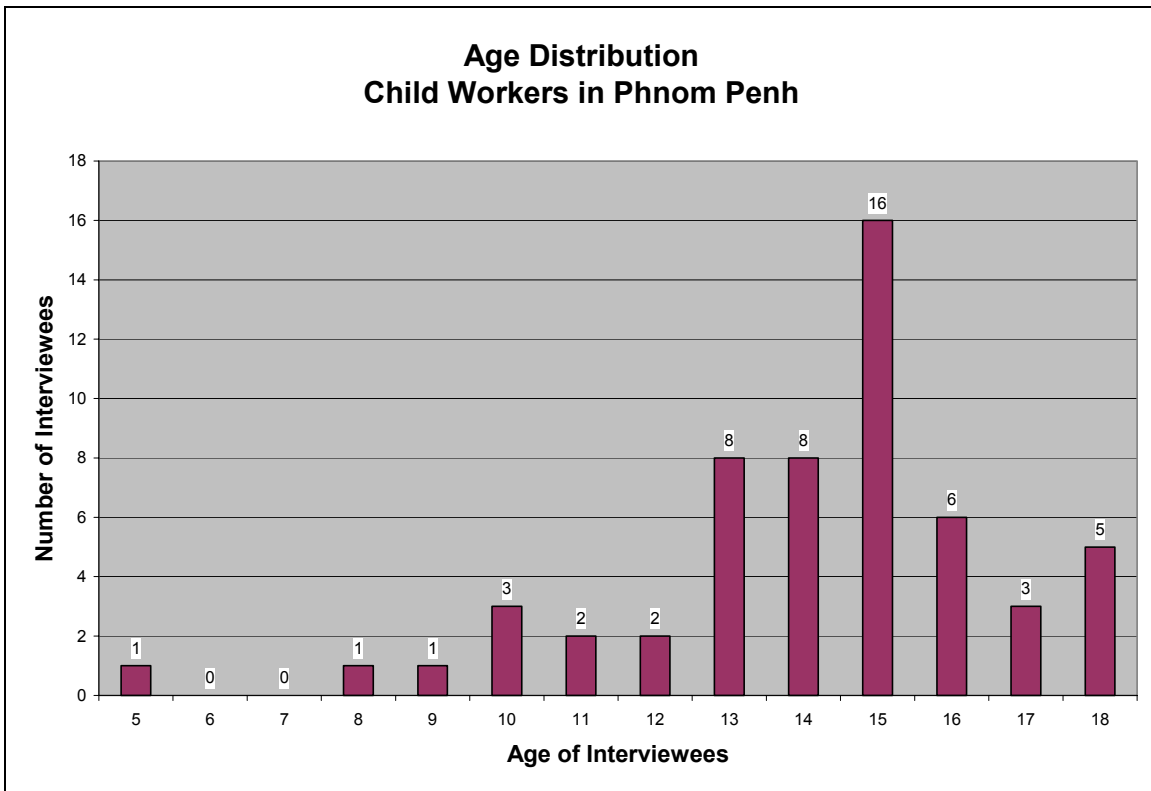
Urban child labor involves children working as domestic workers, scavengers, motorbike/car washers, sellers of food, newspapers, ice cream and knick-knacks, and as day laborers in the country's major cities.

In Phnom Penh, it is a common sight to see children pushing carts collecting recyclables, begging and dusting cars, and working as domestic help at homes and in shops. Phnom Penh's construction sites, the riverfront and market areas, carpentry shops, restaurants, and the Stung Meanchey dump site have children working from dawn to dusk.

## PHNOM PENH

For Phnom Penh, we interviewed 56 child workers working as beggars, scavengers, construction worker, bird catcher, domestic workers and sellers of guidebooks, postcards, newspapers and knick-knacks.

### Age Distribution



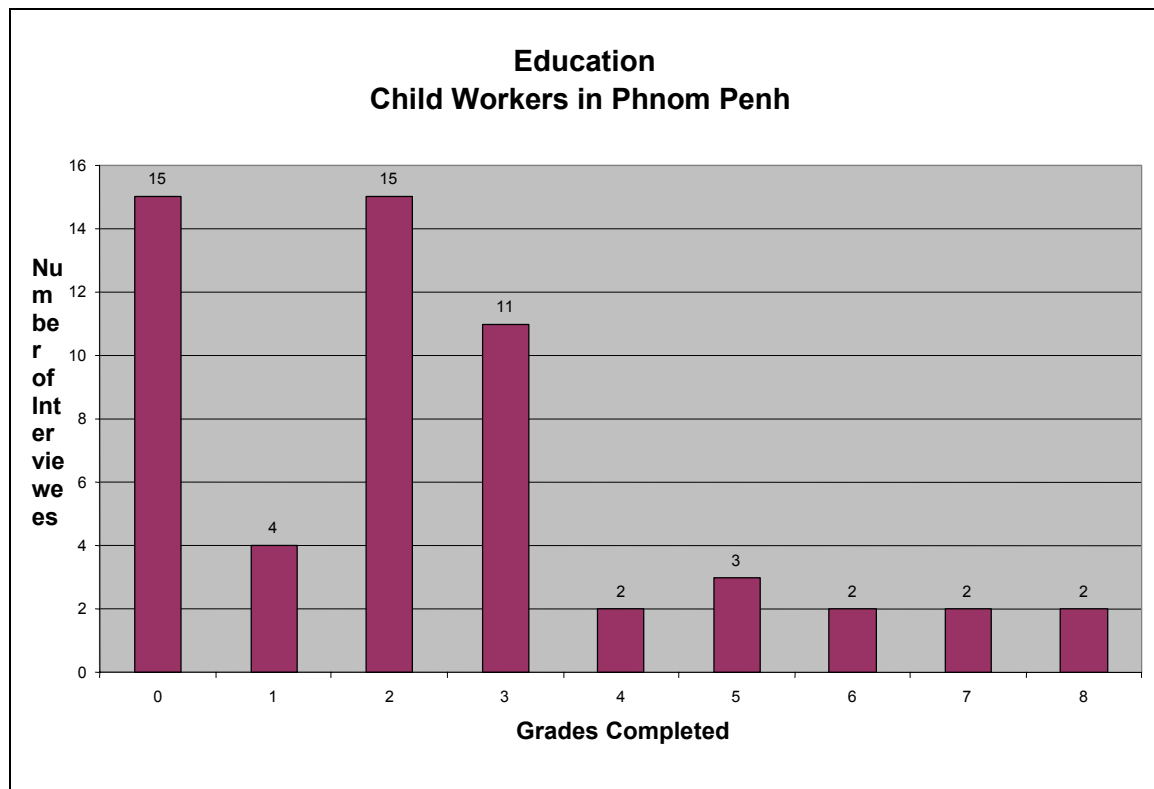
Forty-six interviewees (82%) are age 13 and older while only ten (18%) are under 13 years of age. The five-year old and eight-year old are scavengers working with their mothers collecting recyclables on the streets and at the markets. The nine-year old is a flower seller at popular eateries and pubs frequented by foreigners along the riverfront.

Thirty-eight interviewees (68%) are between 13 to 16 years old. This is the largest group of child workers in our pool of interviewees. Twenty-five of this group (66%) are not currently attending school; seven (13%) are attending public schools while the remaining six (11%) are attending private classes to learn English or attending non-formal education classes provided by NGOs.

### Gender

In our random selection of children at work, we found 53% are female and 47% are male. Our finding of slightly more female child workers than male child workers is consistent with the Cambodia Child Labour Study of 2001 which found urban child workers to be 50.2% female and 49.8% male.

### Education and School Attendance

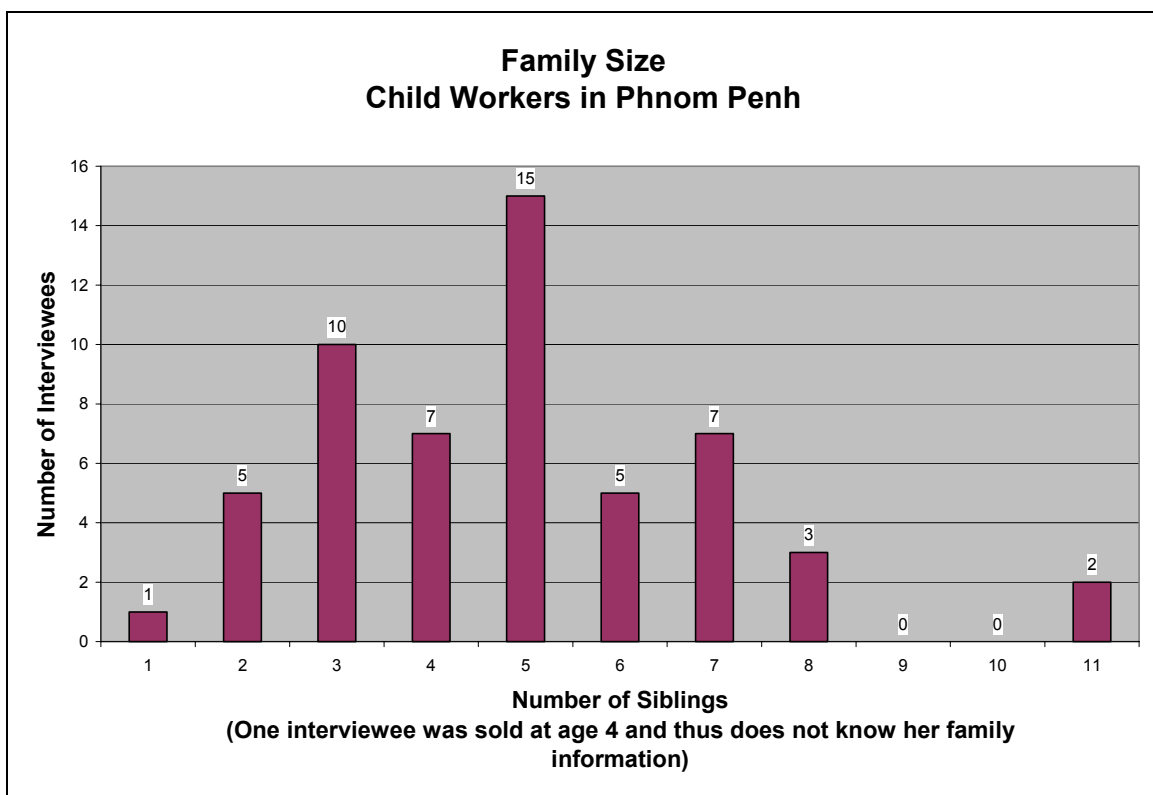


Thirty-seven interviewees (66%) are currently working full-time and not receiving any form of schooling at all. Of the 19 interviewees who are currently attending school, nine (47%) are attending public schools while eight (42%) are attending non-formal education classes provided by NGOs such as Mith Samlanh, World Vision and Pour un Sourire d’Enfant (“PSE”). Two interviewees who are selling guidebooks and postcards to tourists are attending private classes to learn only English.

Fifteen interviewees (27%) are illiterate. Of the 41 interviewees who are literate, only six interviewees (15%) completed primary education (Grades 1 to 6). A majority of the drop out occurs after completion of Grade 3. Our finding of 90% rate of entry in to primary school is higher than the ILO finding that 80% of Cambodia’s rural children obtain primary education, while approximately 4% complete senior secondary school.<sup>12</sup> The ILO finding did not distinguish working or non-working children and we were not able to obtain information on entry in to primary schools by urban children.

A majority of the interviewees said that their parents withdrew them from school to enter the labor force. As such, we believe that school drop-out is not the cause leading children to work but is a symptom or consequence of children working.

### Family Size



Thirty-seven of the 55 interviewees (67%) come from families with 3 to 6 siblings. Only five interviewees (9%) come from families with eight or more siblings. This data shows that the majority of working children (78%) does not come from large families of 7 or more siblings and family size is not the cause of children working.

<sup>12</sup> ILO/EASMAT 2000, cited in Non-Formal Education and Rural Skills Training, ILO Mekong Sub-Regional Project, Page 7.

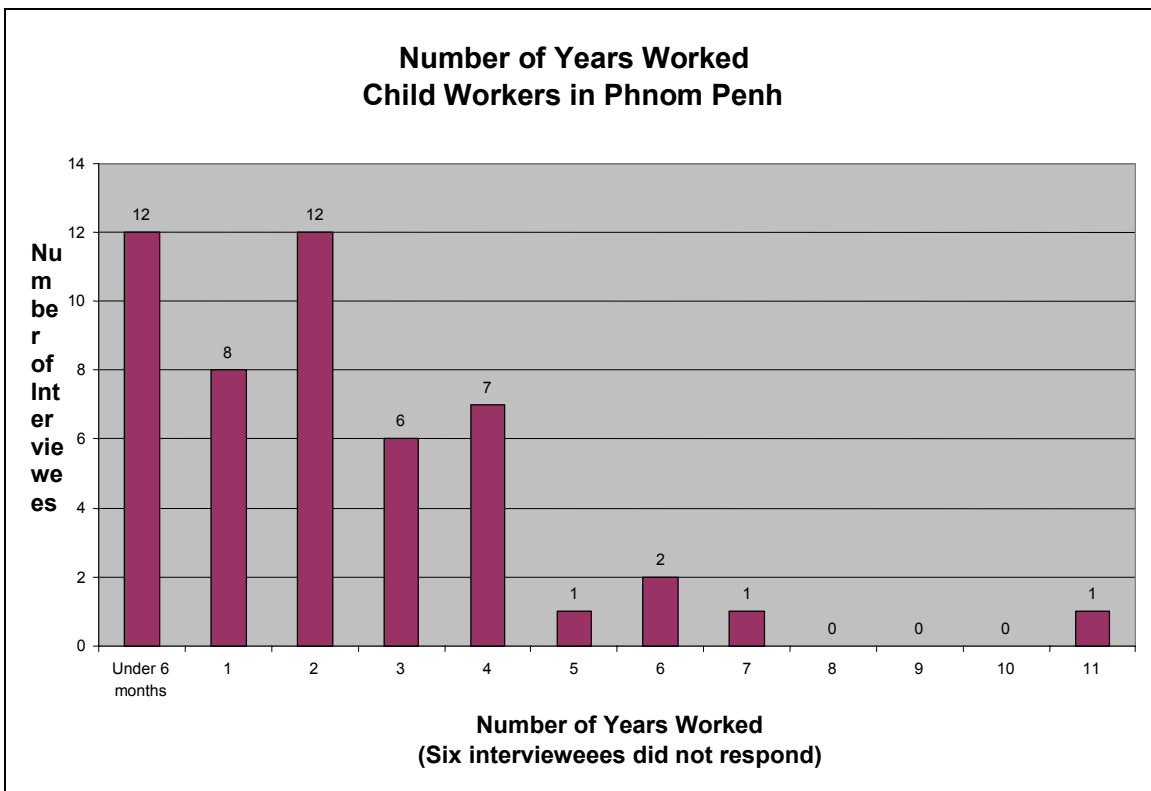
All interviewees keep R200 to R500 per day (US\$.05 to US\$.12) as spending money and give all of their earnings to their parents, guardian or head of the household, such as an aunt or uncle.

The street scavengers, beggars and vendors consider themselves migrants and temporary residents of Phnom Penh and maintain strong emotional connections to their families and community in the rural province. Although they do not consider themselves residents of Phnom Penh, these workers still live in family units, except for the teenage beggars who live with their peers in groups of 2-5 persons.

**Birth Order in the Family**

We are not able to detect any distinguishable pattern of the child workers being the oldest or youngest child in the family.

**Number of Years Worked**



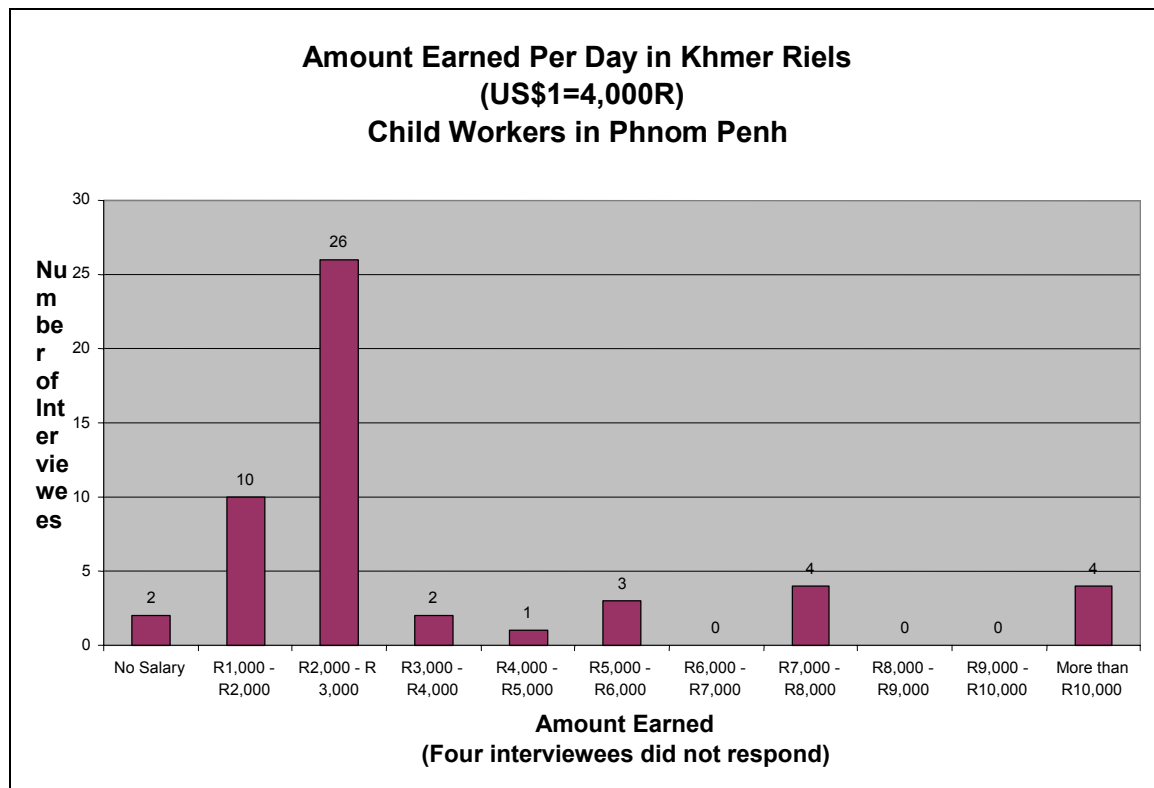
Thirty-two interviewees (64%) have been working for two years or less and only five interviewees (10%) have been working for five years or more. These five interviewees include three scavengers, one domestic worker and one shoe shining boy--all age 15. These five interviewees have been working longer than others because they started their working career at an earlier age than the others.

The twelve interviewees who have been working for less than six months are recent migrants from the rural provinces earning no more than R3,000 per day (US\$.75).

All of the interviewees have never had other paying jobs (except assisting their families with farming or vending activities) prior to their current employment. The informal economy of scrap collecting, domestic work, vending newspapers and knick-knacks serves as introductory employment for most of the child workers and may potentially be long-term employment for others. Because our surveys targeted workers age 18 and under, we were not able to determine how many workers continue to work in these informal sectors after age 18.

The data also shows that the informal economy is accessible to newcomers and is not monopolized by any group. Upon arrival, recent migrants can immediately start collecting scrap at Phnom Penh’s Central Market without the need to pay or obtain permission from any individual or organization. Children can start selling tour guides, flowers and newspapers on the riverfront without the need to obtain permission from any individual or organization.

### Salary Earned



Twenty-six interviewees (50%) earn R2,000 to R3,000 per day (US\$.50 to US\$.75). This group of workers includes eight domestic workers who earn R30,000 per month (US\$7.50) in addition to food and accommodation.

Some of the vendors and scavengers said that they earn R2,000 to R3,000 per day and we believe this to be an underestimation of what they actually earn.<sup>13</sup> We conclude this because both part-time and full-time scavengers said that they earn R2,000 to R3,000 per day and it is likely that the part-time scavengers earn R2,000 to R3,000 per day while the full-time scavengers actually earn about R6,000 per day.

The seasonal and recent migrant child workers are less experienced and less skilled at scavenging and vending and thus earn less than their more skilled peers. In scavenging, the strong and skilled workers can earn up to R7,000 per day while the smaller and less experienced child workers earn approximately R3,000 per day.

Of our interviewees, the highest salary earners are the beggars who earn between R10,000 to R20,000 per day. The second highest salary earners are those selling flowers, guidebooks, newspapers and knick-knacks to tourists who earn approximately R10,000 per day. The lowest salary earners are the domestic workers who earn approximately R1,000 to R2,000 per day (excluding food and accommodation).

### **Working Hours**

Child workers earn the above amounts by 7 days each week and working between nine to twelve hours per day. Domestic workers work from 5 AM until 10 PM (their bedtime); vendors sell ice cream and snacks from 3 PM to 11 PM; daytime scavengers work from dawn to dusk (6AM to 6PM) with a two- or three-hour break at mid-day; night-time street scavengers work from 4PM to 11 PM; and night-time dump site scavengers work from 6 PM to 7 AM.

For children who are currently attending school, they work during off-school hours and on weekends.

### **Reasons for Working**

Child workers who had just arrived to Phnom Penh left their home provinces because of poor agricultural output and view their work in Phnom Penh as a temporary solution to their economic plight at home. With the exception of one petrol vendor who came to Phnom Penh to experience the “big city life”, all child workers came to Phnom Penh to earn money to help their family rather than coming to Phnom Penh to learn new



professional skills or improve their social conditions.

Fourteen interviewees (25%) work to help pay off family debts. Amongst this group, 42% of the domestic

<sup>13</sup> R2,000 to R3,000 is a colloquial method of saying “a few thousand Riels” or “a small amount of cash” and is not the actual amount earned.

workers are working in order to help repay family debts. The interviewees give all of their earnings to their parents or heads of household, who use the money to repay the family debt. We did not find any incident where the child worker was working directly for the creditor or any incident where the worker was himself or herself in debt.

### **Breaks and Rests**

All of the interviewees work in the informal economy without employment contracts, without having to report to a manager or a boss and do not need to clock-in and clock-out. As such, child workers can take breaks and rests whenever they are tired and can stop work when they are ill. The domestic workers interviewed are allowed to rest when they are sick and their employers even purchase medicine for them.

Although the domestic workers are allowed time to rest when they are tired or ill, they are not given time to visit their families in the provinces. Ninety per cent of the domestic workers are allowed to visit their families in the provinces only once a year (usually during the Khmer New Year). Two domestic workers whose parents are working with the garbage collection company Cintri in Phnom Penh are allowed to visit their family every week after they finish their chores. The domestic workers also work 7 days per week.

### **Working Conditions**

Although the scavengers collect and sell their scraps separately, they work in groups of two or more. Child workers at construction sites also work in groups with adults who are relatives, family friends or neighbors. The child workers who beg and sell knick-knacks to tourists along the riverfront have parents, siblings, aunts or cousins watching over them to ensure their safety. The vendors selling to Khmer customers at market areas do not have parents or relatives watching over them.

The domestic workers work alone (except two, who said that the family's children occasionally assist them with some chores) and do not have the opportunity to socialize and mingle with peers or other children.

### **Protective Wear**

All the scavengers at the dump site have metal sticks to dig through the garbage and wear plastic boots. No other protective wear is used. We found only one girl with a Khmer scarf (krama) over her face to protect her from the sun and the toxic smell of the dump site.

The street scavengers do not have plastic boots or gloves to protect them from cuts and sharp garbage when tearing and searching for recyclables in the garbage bags. The domestic workers, vendors and beggars do not have any protective gear.

All of the scavengers have minor cuts, scabs and scars on their feet and arms, and have conspicuous thick, coarse skin on their feet.

### **Work Injuries**

We did not encounter child workers with life-threatening and physically debilitating injuries from their jobs, and the interviewees are not aware of or had ever heard of any other child worker sustaining life-threatening work accidents. In the 1990s, there were reports of garbage trucks hitting or burying children scavengers at the Stung Meanchey dump site, however, our interviewees told us that such incidents no longer occur.

Although the scavengers sustain only minor cuts and the domestic workers the domestic workers sustain minor cuts from food preparation and minor burns from ironing or cooking, we observed that the scavengers have scabies, infections, pus, unhealed open wounds and coarse skin and obvious skin disease on their arms and feet. Some of the domestic workers are physically weak and low in energy in their speech, movement and physical activity.

Of the 56 interviewees in Phnom Penh, three have sustained injuries during working hours. Although the injuries were not directly caused by work activities but were sustained during work, the injuries can be deemed “work-related.” A bird catcher stepped on a nail and was also bitten by a dog while he was pursuing birds; a street scavenger volunteered to pick fruit for a homeowner (to be paid R200 for the work) but fell from the tree and broke his collar bone, shoulders and arms; and an 18-year old street scavenger needed medical stitches after he was robbed and beaten by gangs.

### **Encounters with Authority or Organized Crime**

Nine interviewees (16%) have been threatened, assaulted or robbed by gangs at least once. Of the street scavengers who said that they had no encounter with gangs, we saw on their faces that they were reluctant and fearful to answer truthfully and disclose information on the topic.

The street scavengers are most susceptible to crimes whereas the dump site scavengers, vendors along the riverfront and domestic workers have never been threatened, assaulted or robbed. The street scavenger victims tend to be the older and physically developed workers whereas the physically small and thin street scavengers are not threatened or attacked.

At the time of our interviews, we met an 18-year old street scavenger who was a victim of assault and robbery with bruises, swollen eyes and injuries requiring medical stitches. He is physically tall, developed and looks like a man in his mid-20s rather than a scrawny child.

### **Parents' Occupations**

With the exception of three vendors and a bird catcher, the parents of the child workers we interviewed are living in poverty and work as cyclo drivers, scavengers, and beggars. The parents of the street and dump site scavengers are also scavengers. Two scavengers have parents who are construction workers; one scavenger's parent is a worker with Cintri (garbage collection company); while the parent of another scavenger is a garment factory worker. The parents of child vendors are involved in buying and selling



recyclable paper and market vendors whereas 11 out of 19 (58%) domestic workers' parents are farmers or fishermen.

For occupations with low entry barriers such as knick-knacks vending and occupations requiring no initial capital investment such as scavenging, children tend to follow their parents' trade.

### **NGO Contacts**

Thirty-seven interviewees (66%) have current contacts with an NGO and utilize assistance such as professional and literacy skills training, recreational and social outings and sometimes receive material assistance such as plastic shoes and First-Aid medical needs.

All of the domestic workers interviewed are attending cooking, sewing and literacy training with VCAO; the dump site scavengers are attending literacy training at World Vision ADP in Stung Meanchey and PSE (Pour un Sourire d'Enfant); whereas the street scavengers and others are casual drop-ins at Mith Samlanh.

The current NGO activities serve the short-term and immediate needs of child workers rather than provide long-term solutions to end the worst forms of child labor. For example, World Vision provides First-Aid medicine and assists with taking children with urgent medical needs to clinics and PSE provides incentives for dump site child scavengers to attend classes. These services are not intended to end the worst forms of child labor.

## CASE STUDIES: INDUSTRIES INTERVIEWED

### 1. Scrap Collecting

We interviewed seven scavengers at the Stung Meanchey dump site, seven full-time street scavengers and six part-time street scavengers. Scavengers include both boys and girls, as young as 5 helping their mothers or older siblings. Some of the scavengers sometimes do not have enough to eat.

The full-time scavengers in Phnom Penh earn between R5,000 to R6,000 per day (US\$1.25 to US\$1.50) which is less than the R10,000 (US\$2.50) per day earned by their counterparts in Battambang. A majority of the full-time scavengers in Phnom Penh are migrants from rural provinces and generally view their time in Phnom Penh as temporary.

Scavenging along the streets and at market areas is more lucrative than scavenging at the Stung Meanchey dump site where dump site staff may chase the scavengers away and where trucks with garbage from high-end hotels may have been “bought” by certain scavengers and thus not accessible to others.



*A girl scavenger at the Stung Meanchey dump site.*

Night-time scavenging on the streets and at the dump site is the most lucrative because residences, bars and hotels take out their trash in the evening or night time. Although one would expect the risks involved in night-time scrap collecting to be higher in health hazards, contacts with dangerous substances, susceptibility to injury, and increased exposure to violence, physical and sexual abuse, and nocturnal criminal activities, our interviews indicate otherwise. Our interviews show that the night-time scavengers do not experience any higher incident of crime or injuries than their day-time counterparts. Night-time scavengers at the dump site wear head flash lights and work in groups, and night-time street scavengers also work in groups to ensure their safety.

We interviewed a group of street scavengers living in family units in the Vietnamese-Cambodian Friendship Park. The scavengers have scabies, skin disease, infections, swollen pus or obvious skin disease on their feet and arms. These scavengers had encountered gangs who extorted money from them and one 18-year old street scavenger was a recent victim of assault and robbery. Of the scavengers living in this park who said that they had no encounter with gangs, we saw on their faces that they were reluctant and fearful to answer truthfully and disclose information on the topic.

Traders in recyclables (those buying and selling) are profusely located throughout the city and at the dump site. The ready-and-easy access to purchasers of recyclables allows the child scavengers to frequently sell and unload their bags and carts, easing the weight they carry and lessening the risks of being targets of robberies.

## **2. Vending/Selling**

The ice cream sellers rent the plastic cart by depositing US\$50 and purchase the ice cream, drinks and juice for re-sale. The profit is approximately R5,000 per day. The flower sellers purchase wholesale flowers and re-sell to tourists earning approximately R10,000 per day. Those selling newspapers buy two or three papers from a stall and sell them to tourists. Sometimes, after the tourists have finished reading, the newspaper is returned to the child vendors for re-sale.

Child workers selling ice cream at the markets, along the riverfront, in front of the royal palace or at public parks work alone in that money is individually and separately earned but they are part of an informal network of peers and colleagues who keep track of each other's whereabouts and activities. The vendors and sellers have not encountered gangs, robberies or kidnappings.

## **3. Domestic Work**

According to the Year 2003 Survey on Child Domestic Workers in Phnom Penh by the National Institute of Statistics, there were approximately 27,950 children working as domestic workers (9.6% of children between age 7 to 17 living in Phnom Penh).<sup>14</sup>

We interviewed 19 child domestic workers who are participants in VCAO's training centers at the Psa Samaki, Boeung Kak, and Teuk La Ak areas. The participants are learning sewing, cooking, hairdressing and basic literacy skills in the morning or afternoon for one to three hours, depending on arrangements made with the household owners. Our interviewees have been in training at VCAO between two months to one year.

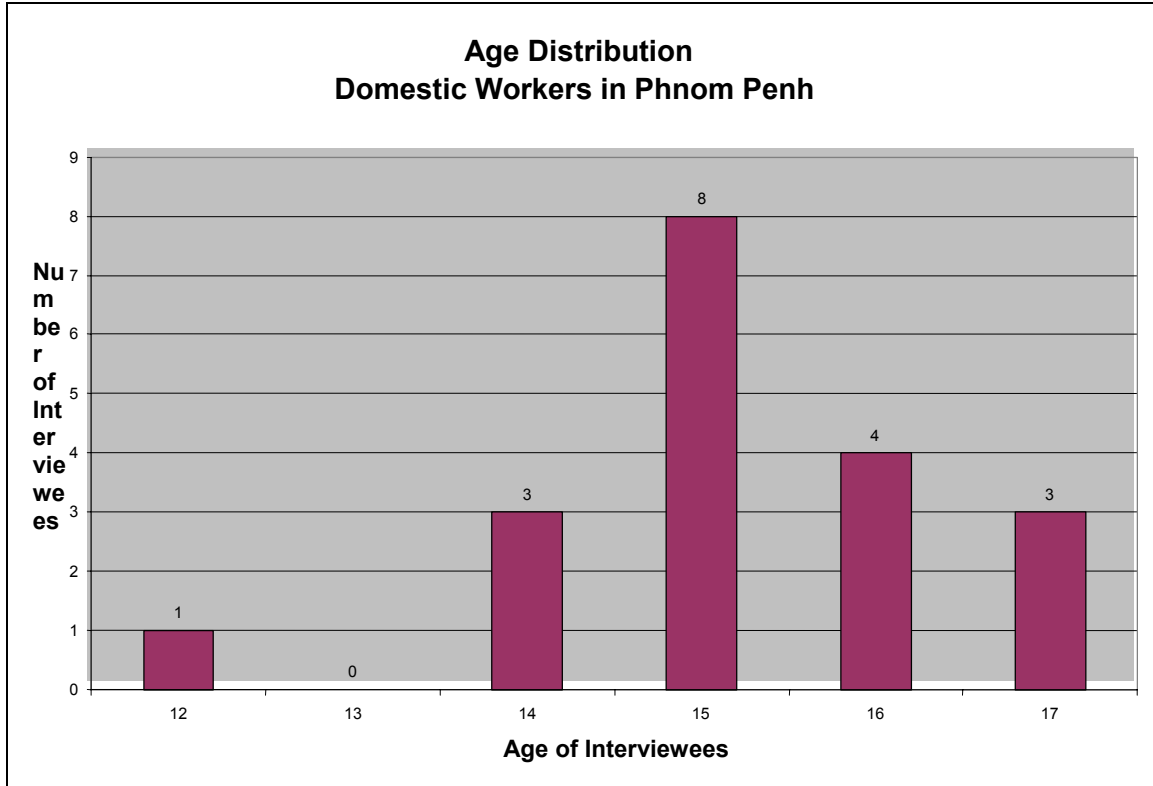
We did not ask about sexual abuse by employers as many of the interviewees are very defensive and scared to disclose any information about the household owners. Many feel fortunate to be allowed to leave the household premises to attend training and thus would not dare say anything about the employer that might jeopardize their situation.

VCAO works with the Sangkat leaders to obtain household owners' permission for the child domestic workers to participate in the training. Two of VCAO's training centers are located in the local Sangkat chief's offices. By being allowed to attend training sessions, our interviewees' employers are most likely "model employers." As such, our interviewees' work conditions and relationship with their employers may not be representative of all child domestic workers.

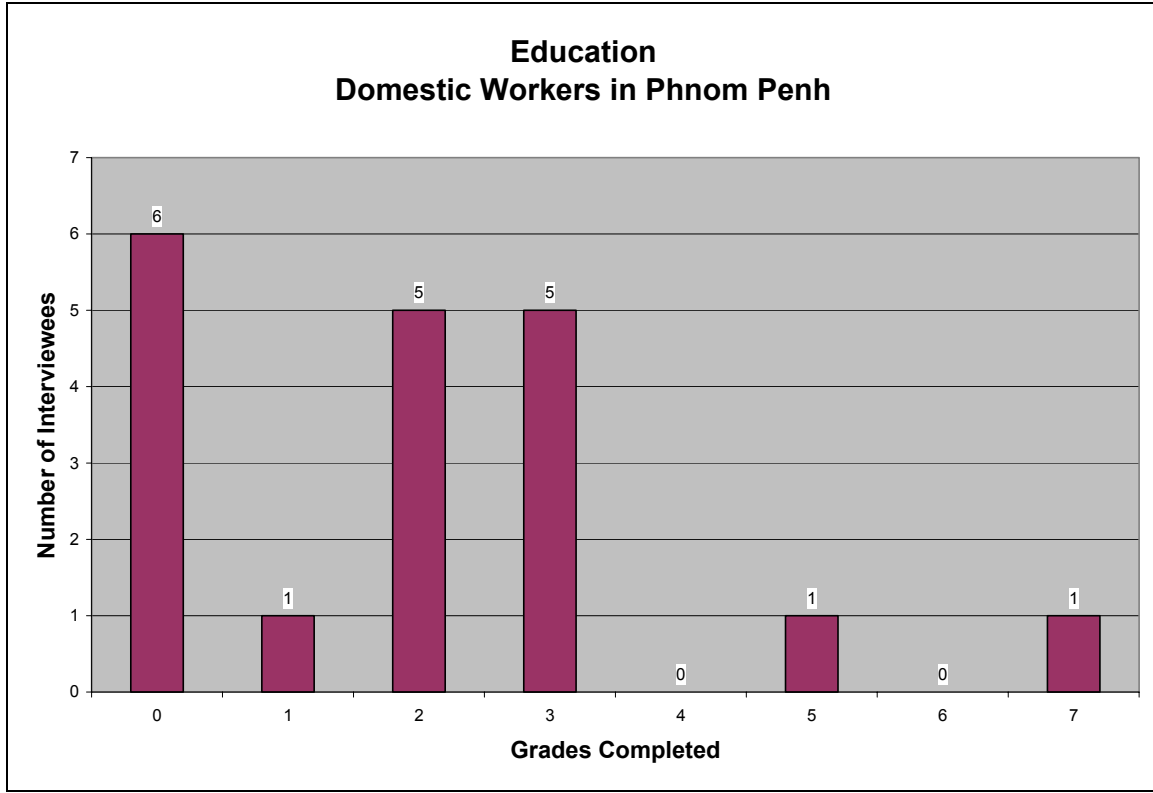
Limited access to the child domestic workers is illustrated by the fact that of the more than 250 child domestic workers reached by VCAO's programs, only two participants are male whereas the Survey on Child Domestic Workers found more female child domestic workers than male (58.6% female and 41.4% male). There were no male participants during our interviews.

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<sup>14</sup> NIS/ILO Survey on Child Domestic Workers in Phnom Penh-2003, Pg. 32.

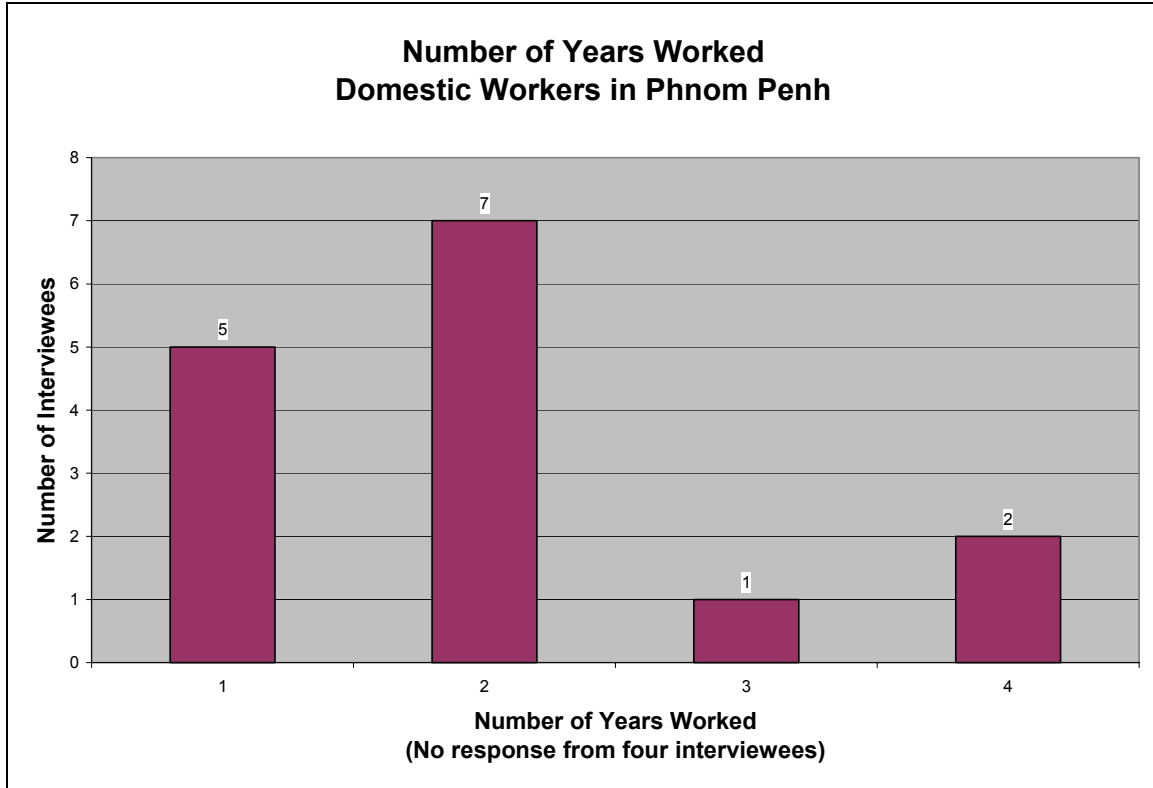


Eight of the domestic workers (42%) are 15 years old, with only one 12-year old child domestic worker.



All interviewees work full-time and are not currently attending school, except for skills training with VCAO. Six interviewees (32%) never attended school and are illiterate, and 12 interviewees (63%) had entered primary school, with only one interviewee (8%) completing primary education (she studied up to Grade 7).

*Number of Years Worked*



Twelve interviewees (63%) have been working at the same household between one to two years. Only two interviewees (11%) have been working for four years. The concentration of domestic workers between age 15 to 16 and the finding that 63% work for less than two years show that domestic work is not long-term employment or that employers prefer young workers between age 15 to 16. It is possible that many of the child domestic workers enter the garment industry after attaining age of majority and attaining some sewing skills and work experience as domestic workers.

*Working Conditions*

Child domestic workers cook, clean, wash, provide childcare, escort the household owners' children to and from school, and if the household owner is a vendor at the market or a shopkeeper at home, the child domestic workers also assist with the business.

Sixteen interviewees (84%) work alone (there are no other domestic workers in the household) but there may be security guards, drivers or other household help. All interviewees have been verbally scolded when they make mistakes. With the exception of two interviewees, all interviewees view the verbal scolding as positive instructions, guidance and directions rather than as any form of abuse. Only one interviewee reported being lightly hit for making mistakes.

### *Working Hours*

Domestic workers work from 4:30 AM or 5:00 AM until 10 PM or 11 PM (their bedtime), 7 days per week. The interviewees are given time to rest, watch television, and some are given permission to leave the household premises during the day and interact with others near the household after chores are completed.

### *Salary Earned*

All interviewees live with the household owners and earn between R30,000 to R50,000 per month (US\$7.50 to US\$12.50), in addition to food and accommodation. All interviewees (with the exception of the two orphans) send all of their earnings to their parents and keep R4,000 or R5,000 per month as spending money.

Five interviewees work in households where the owners are professional workers (most likely NGO workers) and four interviewees work in households where the owners are market vendors. Forty-one per cent of the domestic workers work in households with five persons and only one interviewee work in a family of seven persons.

All interviewees have enough to eat; they reported being given time to rest when they are ill and that the employer even purchase medicine for them. The domestic workers sustain minor cuts from food preparation and minor burns from cooking, but no one had ever been forced to lift heavy items or perform strenuous work beyond their physical strength.

All (except two interviewees) found work through neighbors and villagers who knew that the household owners in Phnom Penh needed domestic help and no interviewee paid commission or referral fee. With the exception of two interviewees who work for relatives, no employer has any direct business relationship with the domestic workers' families.

### *Reasons for Working*

Eight (42%) interviewees said that the primary reason they work is to help repay family debts. Four of the interviewees were denied work in the garment industry because they lacked skills and physical strength required by the garment factories, but the real reason may be that they are under age (13 or 12 when they applied for work at the garment factories).

No interviewees had paying employment prior to their current jobs. All interviewees are paid for their work and no interviewee ever had their salary deducted for any reason.

No interviewees have ever been victims of robbery, theft, or assault in their current living situations. They attribute their safety to their employers owning or living in flats and houses made of concrete rather than attributing their safety to the fact that they do not leave the household premises.

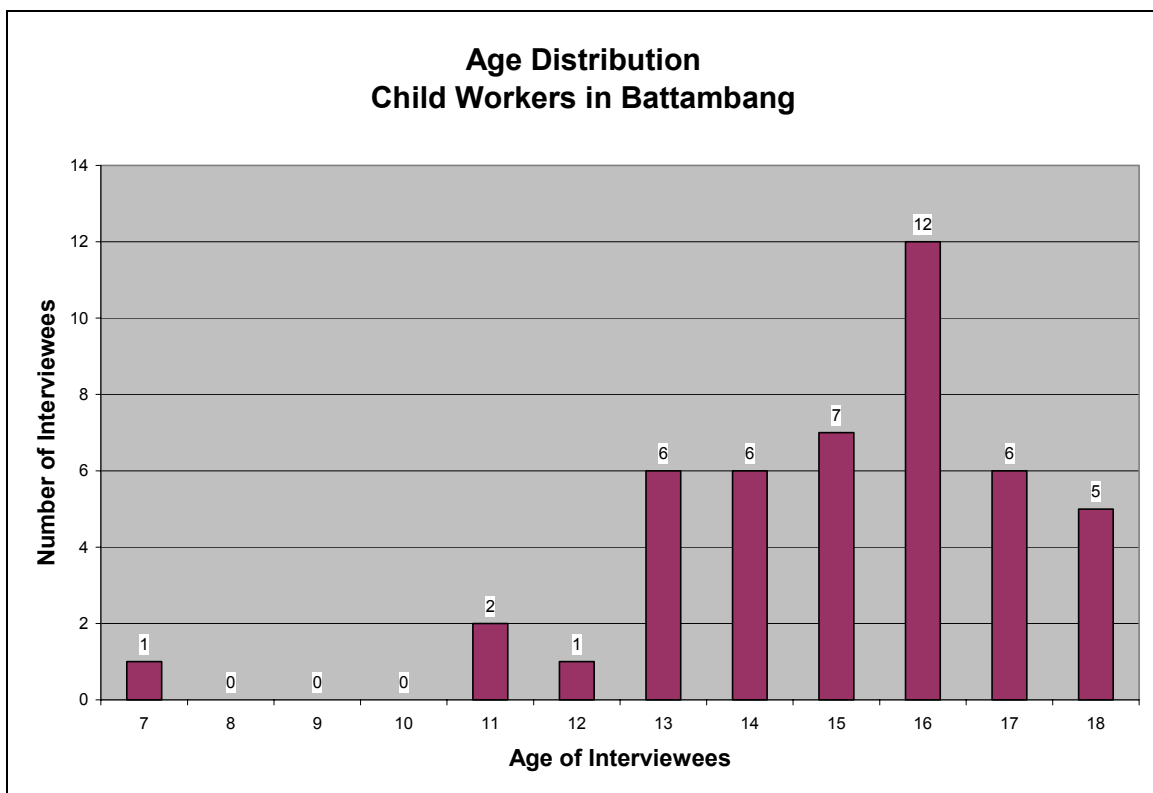
Sixteen interviewees (84%) are allowed to visit their families in the rural provinces only once a year (usually during the Khmer New Year). One interviewee told us that when she visited her family, the employer accompanied her to the village because of fear that

she would not return. The Cambodian Labour Law (1997) requires employers to provide 25 paid national holidays per year to employees, however, the Labour Law is expressly not applicable to domestic work.

## BATTAMBANG

Over a period of six days in June 2005, we interviewed 46 child laborers working as street sweepers, street scavengers, dump site scavengers, construction workers, brick factory workers, restaurant workers, cow herder, anchovies cleaners, day laborers/dock workers, hotel cleaners, noodle seller, and car/motorbike washers.

### Age



Forty-two interviewees (91%) are age 13 and older while the seven-year old was accompanying and assisting his older sister and not working independently. As compared to Phnom Penh, Battambang has fewer child workers under age 13.

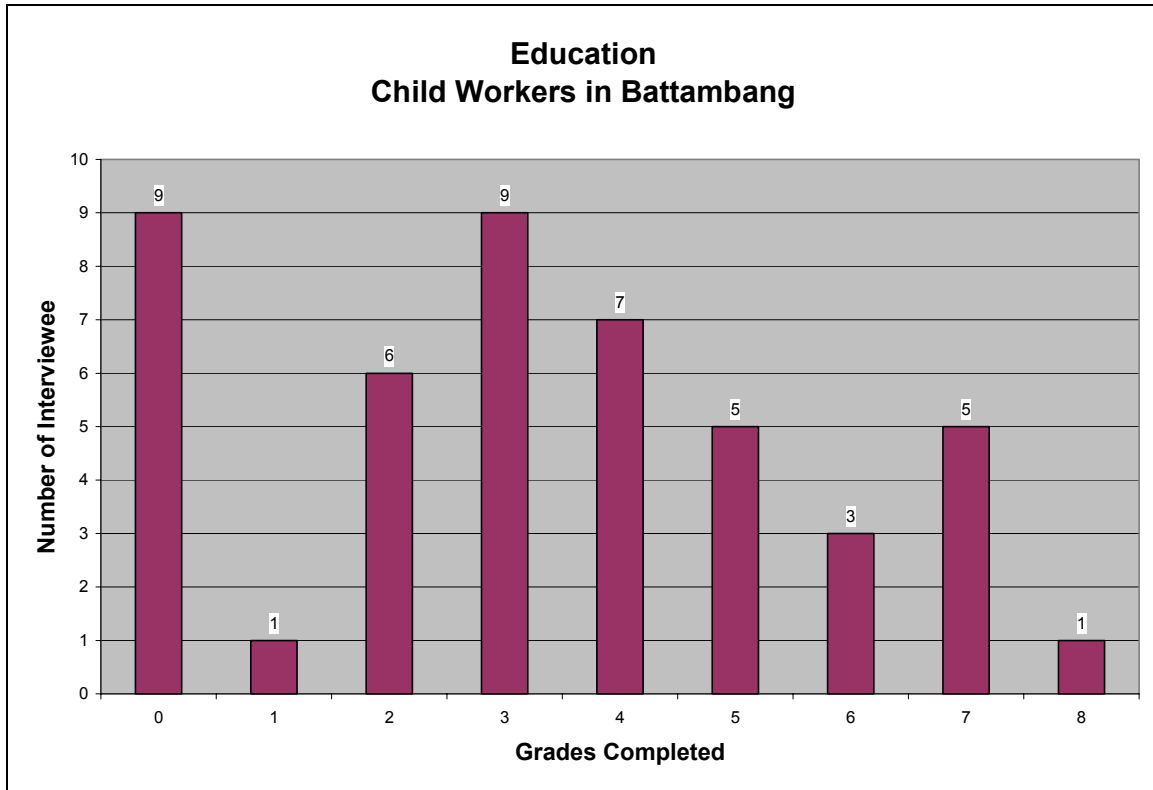
With the exception of the noodle seller (noodle selling requires capital investment by the family), all the child workers we met in Battambang are stunted in growth. The motorbike/car washers, scavengers, beggars, and dock workers look younger and are shorter than other children their age. None of the interviewees are underweight and all are currently receiving enough to eat, however, they may have had poor nutrition before joining the work force.



## Gender

In our random selection of child laborers at work, we found that 43% are female and 57% are male. Our finding of more male child workers than female child workers is inconsistent with the Cambodia Child Labour Study of 2001 which found urban child workers to be 50.2% female and 49.8% male.

## Education and School Attendance

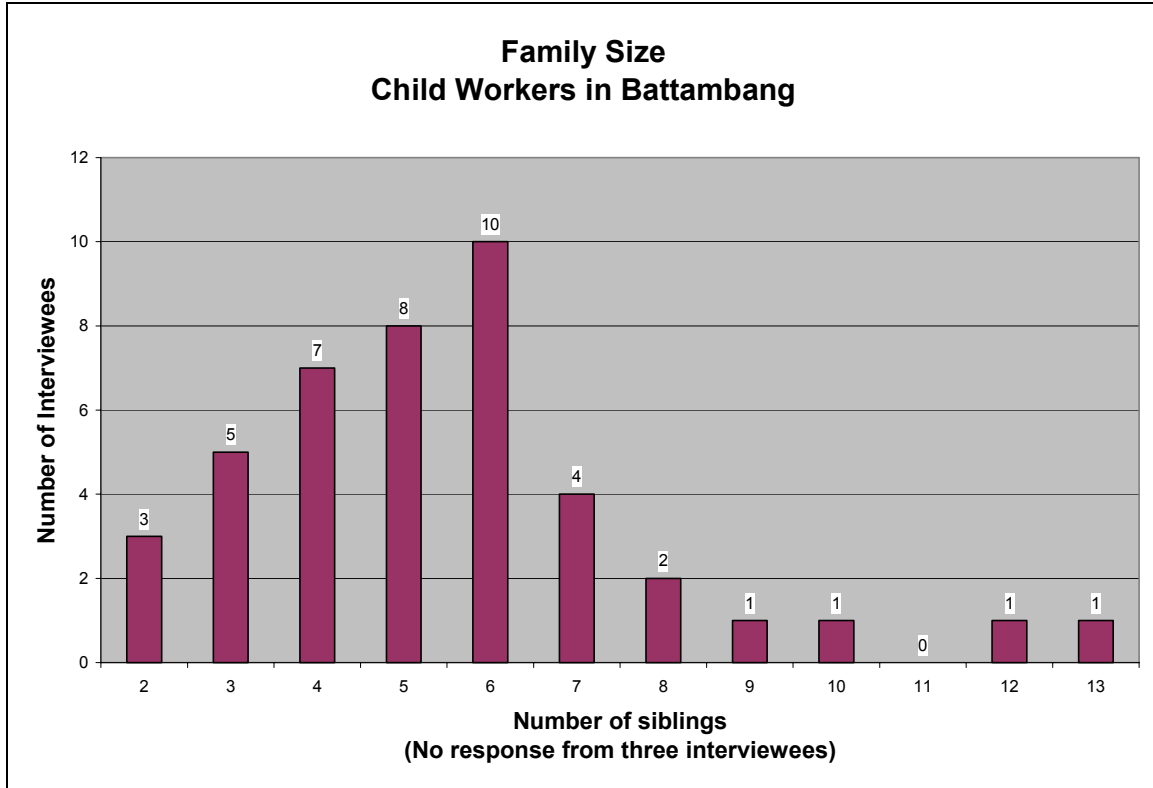


Thirty-two interviewees (70%) are currently working full-time and not attending school and their parents withdrew them from school to work because of poverty and to help support the family survival. Of the 14 interviewees who are currently attending school, all are attending government public schools. We did not find any interviewee attending NGO or private school classes.

Nine interviewees (20%) had received no education and are illiterate. Of those who had attended schools, six interviewees (16%) completed primary school (Grades 1 to 6). Our finding of 80% of the child workers entering primary school is consistent with the ILO finding that 80% of Cambodia's rural children obtain primary education.<sup>15</sup> Our finding of 13% primary school completion in Battambang is comparable to our finding of 15% primary school completion in Phnom Penh.

<sup>15</sup> ILO/EASMAT 2000, cited in Non-Formal Education and Rural Skills Training, ILO Mekong Sub-Regional Project, Page 7.

## Family Size



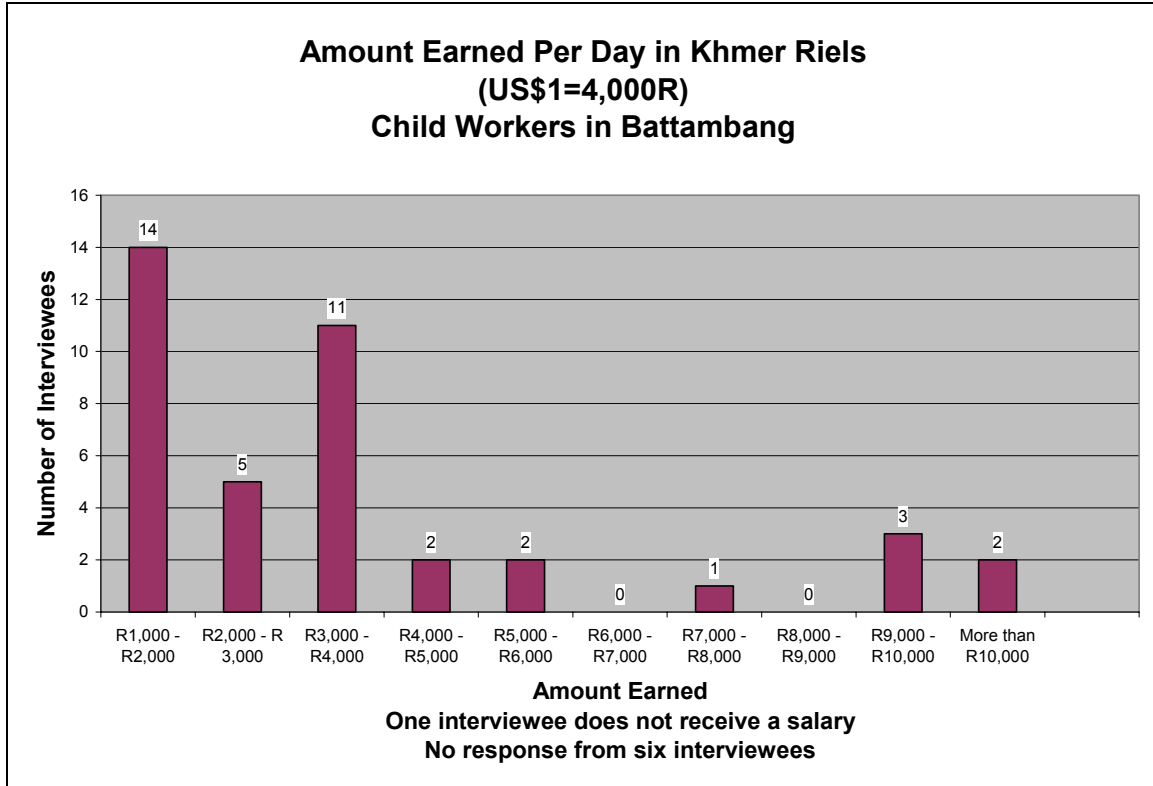
Thirty interviewees (65%) come from families with 3 to 6 siblings while only six interviewees (13%) come from families with 8 or more siblings. All interviewees give all of the earnings to parents, guardians or head of the household such as an aunt or uncle.

Except for the motorbike/car washers, all of the child workers consider themselves natives of Battambang province (their province of birth) and live in family units with parents or relatives. The beggars and glue sniffers in Battambang also live in family units whereas the few teenage beggars in Phnom Penh live on their own outside of family units.

### **Birth Order in the Family**

We are not able to detect any distinguishable pattern of the child workers being the oldest or youngest child in the family.

## Salary Earned



Fourteen interviewees (30%) earn between R1,000 to R2,000 per day. This group of workers includes six working at a motorbike/car wash establishment where they also receive food and accommodation in addition to the salary.

The street and dump site scavengers are the highest salary earners, earning between R10,000 to R20,000 per day. The lowest salary earners are the dock workers who earn about R500 to R1,000 per day but can earn up to R10,000 per day during the busy season when they can work both day and night shifts.

A majority of the child workers in Battambang (beggars, brick factory workers, and anchovies cleaners) earn approximately R4,000 per day.

## Working Hours

Similar to their counterparts in Phnom Penh, child workers earn the above amounts by working nine to twelve hours per day, 7 days per week. The anchovies cleaners earn according to the amount of fish cleaned and the scavengers earn according to the amounts collected and generally work from 7 AM to 4 PM with mid-day breaks. The motorbike/car washers work from dawn to dusk, seven days per week when the motorbike/car wash is open for business.

For children who are currently attending school, they work during off-school hours and on weekends.

### **Reasons for Working**

All six motorbike/car washers come from Kandal province and work because their families are in debt. We did not inquire about the causes and amount of debts but were told that the debts were incurred during periods of food shortage. The interviewees give their earnings to their parents or heads of household who use the money to pay off the debt. We did not find any incident where the child worker is working directly for the family's creditor.

All interviewees work to earn money for their families and we did not meet any interviewee who work to learn new skills or improve their conditions. All interviewees work to contribute to family survival rather than to improve their future.

### **Breaks and Rests**

With the exception of the hotel cleaners and motorbike/car washers, all interviewees are self-employed in the informal economy working without employment contracts or having to report to a manager or boss. As such, the child workers can take breaks, rests and time off when they are tired or ill. Even for child workers at the hotel and motorbike/car wash establishments, the interviewees are allowed time off when they are ill and their employers even purchase medicine for them.

The hotel cleaners and motorbike/car washers have meal breaks however can be called to work if there are customers. Although these child workers have idle time when there are no customers at the hotel or at the car wash, these times cannot be deemed "breaks and rests" because the child workers are still on the work premises and are still on-call for work.

### **Working Conditions**

Child laborers at the brick factories work alongside with their parents, siblings or cousins; the anchovies cleaners work with their mothers, siblings or neighbors; and although the scavengers sell their scraps separately, they still work in groups of at least two persons. The cow herder is an orphan tending her adopted family's herd but works in the field with the neighbor's children.

### **Protective Wear**

When asked if they use protective equipment while working, brick factory workers and scavengers pointed to their plastic thongs as their protective wear. The child workers are unaware of the protective wear and equipment that can be used in their hazardous jobs. For example, the dump site scavengers seem not to be aware of gloves, masks, or other protective items they can use to protect themselves from the toxic fume, chemical and sharp items that may be in the trash.

### **Work Injuries**

None of the interviewees have ever had any life-threatening or physically debilitating accident at work. The brick factory workers sustain minor injuries when bricks fall on their feet or they bruise themselves while laying and moving bricks; and none of the interviewees are aware of any other children sustaining debilitating accidents at work.

### **Encounters with Authority or Organized Crime**

No interviewees reported having any encounter with the police, village leaders or other governmental authority in their work. None of the interviewees have ever been robbed and there is no indication of gangs terrorizing the child workers. The street scavengers are scolded by homeowners if they tear garbage bags, but never experienced any other form of abuse.

The absence of robbery, assault or encounters with gangs may be attributed to the child workers working in groups, working in neighborhoods near their homes, and frequently emptying and selling recyclables collected. The child workers generally do not have any substantial amount of cash or goods on them to attract criminal activity.

### **Parents' Occupations**

With the exception of the noodle seller, the parents of the child workers we interviewed are living in poverty. Child workers in brick factories, construction work, anchovies cleaning and scavenging have the same occupation as their parents whereas those in hotel cleaning, motorbike/car washing and day laborers do not have the same occupation as their parents. The parents of hotel cleaners, motorbike/car washers and day laborers are farmers, fishermen, and market stall vendors.

### **NGO Contacts**

Only six interviewees (13%) have contacts with NGOs. Kumar Reakrieye occasionally takes the child scavengers at the dump site on social outings and recreational activities. All interviewees are familiar with the service and assistance offered by NGOs; however, they (and their family) still do not contact NGOs.

The interviewees expressed limited trust on long-term assistance, permanent solutions and reliability of support from NGOs. As such, most interviewees rely on their bosses or family members for assistance rather than NGOs.

## **CASE STUDIES: INDUSTRIES INTERVIEWED**

### **1. Scrap Collecting**

Although not a highly respected occupation and fraught with health hazards (toxic fume, cuts and scolding from homeowners for tearing garbage bags), scavenging on the streets or at the dump site provides flexible scheduling and is high-paying where the child workers earn approximately R10,000 to R20,000 per day in Battambang.

After the garbage at the dump site is burned each day, the ashes are washed away and collected in the small moat around the dump site. Adult scavengers generally use sticks to filter the mud/ashes looking for burned aluminum and other goods. This is a dangerous task where the scavengers immerse their bodies in the ashes and very few child scavengers perform this task. The one interviewee who perform this task said that he sometimes even finds gold and jewelry in the ashes and earns about R15,000 per day.

Unlike Phnom Penh, there is no night scavenging on the streets or at the dump site in Battambang.

## **2. Motorbike/Car Wash**

Along Battambang's riverfront, we interviewed six child workers working at a motorbike/car wash establishment. They come from Kandal province, the home province of the car wash proprietor, and were introduced to the employer through an informal network of distant relatives and neighbors.

The primary reason for these child workers leaving their home provinces to work is family debts. There is no indication, and we do not believe that the parents are in debt to the car wash proprietor. When a child worker begins work, the car wash owner usually pays to the child workers' parents two to three months of salary in advance. If the child continues to work after the advanced period, the salary will then be paid at the end of each month. All salary is paid directly to the parents (not to the child workers) and the worker turnover is high as parents generally take the children back to the province when farming conditions improve. This salary payment arrangement seems to be done to help the child workers' family rather than any form of debt bondage.

The child workers live and eat on the car wash premises and are not allowed to venture away from the premises. The inability to leave the premises leads to their safety and lack of encounter with gangs and criminal activities.

## **3. Brick Factories**

We visited three brick factories and were told that there were no child laborers on the premises. As we remained on the premises of one factory, we learned that there were child workers at the factory. We interviewed six child laborers and found that one was 11 years old, two were 13 years old, one was 15 years old, and two were 17 years old. The child workers were working alongside their family members—siblings, uncles or cousins.

Some of the families live on the factory premises and others commute to work. Child laborers load and unload bricks and materials on to trucks; move bricks into and out of kilns; and assist adult workers with all tasks. We did not see or hear of any fatal or debilitating accidents involving children at the factory we visited, but the interviewees were scared and nervous to speak to us. Thus, we believe that we did not obtain accurate information on work accidents or other information that may incriminate the factory.

## **4. Begging**

The child beggars work in groups of two or more and aim to earn enough to support their weekly food intake. The beggars are not street children as they return to family units at night but we observed that many are mentally unstable and physically unhealthy.

## **5. Anchovies (Prahok) Cleaning**

“Prahok” is salted small fish that ferment for 6 months or more. It is as traditional as lemongrass in Khmer cuisine. The prahok or anchovies cleaners sit on small stools on

the ground in groups of 4 or 5 and cut away the fins, scales and internals of anchovies. They are paid R200 per kilogram of cleaned anchovies. As anchovies are fish that have been fermenting for at least six months, the smell can make the child workers nauseous. While using knives to gut the anchovies, the child laborers are also susceptible to minor cuts and the salt from the anchovies can irritate any cut.

Anchovies cleaning at Battambang's Psa Prahok is seasonal work with children working from 6 AM to midnight during busy seasons, earning R10,000 or more. During months without work, children would attend school, play and wait near the dock for work.

## CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

### Vulnerability

The scavengers, day laborers, beggars and vendors will remain working in these dangerous occupations because their current earnings go to food, shelter and repaying family debts. There is no saving and no capital for purchase of any substantial consumer product or methods out of the poverty cycle. The child workers, particularly the female child workers, are susceptible to voluntarily entering the commercial sex trade in order to escape their current labor situation.

We have already encountered drug abuse (glue sniffing) amongst the child beggars in Battambang, and as drugs cost money, child workers may also be susceptible to resort to criminal activities to support their drug dependency.

Sixteen (84%) of the domestic workers interviewed work alone in isolated environments without contacts with peers or family. The Survey on Child Domestic Workers found

that child domestic workers endure a lot of stress that may be directly related to the tasks performed, but both male and female domestic workers endure fear, tension, anxiety and exhaustion every day.<sup>16</sup> Such stress may lead to



*Street children living in groups.*

other illnesses in the future. Allegations of physical and sexual abuse of domestic workers far exceed the number of cases actually reported to NGOs and government authority.

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<sup>16</sup> NIS/ILO Survey on Child Domestic Workers in Phnom Penh-2003, Section 4.9.



### **Social Development and Self-Esteem**

The activities of child workers examined in this report are not highly respected by society. Street scavengers are scolded by homeowners and must be vigilant not to tear garbage bags; domestic workers are subservient during their working and non-working (as they live with the household owner); and beggars are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In addition to the above, most child workers are not able to become educated.

Child workers wear the badge of poverty at an early age and will bear the stigma of poverty into adulthood. The consequence will be a population of adults with low self-esteem

## CONCLUSION

Of the activities of the child laborers we examined, we believe that scavenging at the dump site is the “worst form of child labor” because the fume and extremely unsanitary and toxic conditions at the dump site have caused obvious skin disease on the child workers and may have caused other not-yet-visible health injuries. Children work at the dump site 12 hours per day, 7 days per week and are not attending school. The night-time scavengers work from 6 PM to 7 AM and sleep during the day, thereby also not attending school. The dangerous work conditions and long hours jeopardize the health, safety and moral development of the child as stated in ILO Convention 182.

Children working at the brick factories, cleaning anchovies, working as day laborers, washing cars and motorbikes, and domestic workers work 12 hours per day, 7 days per week and are not in school. Although their working conditions are not as dangerous and hazardous as those of the dumpsite scavengers and the tasks performed do not involve the risk of death or long-term injuries, it can be argued that the long hours undoubtedly jeopardize the child’s moral development. Whether or not the above tasks performed by children meet the legal categorization of “worst forms of child labor” is not as significant as the need to develop programs to remove children from such work.

Child domestic workers work alone in environments isolated from their families, peers and society. Although the work may not be strenuous and they are receiving shelter and enough food, the domestic workers live in fear, tension, anxiety and exhaustion and need assistance with literacy training, skills training to prepare them for other occupations. The current practice of allowing child domestic workers to visit their families in the rural provinces only once or twice a year is tantamount to confinement, slavery and emotional abuse, all of which are violations of human rights as protected by international law.

There is currently a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities for child workers and their families. Child laborers work to meet day-to-day emergency to survive, and there remains the critical need to train and develop marketable skills that will break them from the poverty cycle. Assistance to address family basic needs is necessary in order to prevent exploitation of the children.

We met with NGOs working to serve the needs of children, however, with the exception of ILO/IPEC’s Time-Bound Program, we do not believe that any organization is working to combat the worst forms of child labor. Any campaign to combat the worst forms of child labor must include “fall-back programs or scenarios” that if a family must send a child to work, the younger ones without any education should not be sent before the older children.

In our survey, we were surprised to learn that there is no entry barrier to children working in the informal economy. Specifically, we were pleasantly surprised that there are no gangs controlling territories at Phnom Penh’s or Battambang’s market areas; there are no gangs controlling scavenging turfs; and we were awed by the child workers’ adept skills

at avoiding injuries while performing dangerous tasks such as picking through garbage at night time.

We were also pleasantly surprised about the safety of the child workers. The informal network that keeps track of the children's whereabouts and the system of working along with family members or with members of their community ensure the child workers' safety.

Any effort to reduce the number of working children collecting scrap on the streets or at garbage dump sites will require work targeted to improving housing conditions (increase in home ownership and increasing purchasing power), improving overall food security, and developing safer work options by encouraging families to develop their own businesses or developing skills that can be immediately utilized by major industries such as the garment sector or the construction industry.

Our surveys obtained certain information on the working conditions, background and demographics of child workers, and do not in anyway purport to provide all information about child workers in Cambodia. Studies and projects involving child workers in Cambodia will benefit from future research on: 1) the amounts and causes of family debts, 2) the actual contribution of the child workers' earnings in lowering family debts, 3) the number of child workers who continue working in the informal economy into adulthood; 4) the health of child domestic workers, scavengers and anchovies cleaners as they mature into adulthood; 5) sexual and physical abuse and the general situation of domestic child workers not receiving NGO services; and 6) child labor in rural areas.

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# APPENDIX 1

## Survey Form

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

### Background Information

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
Each day, what tasks do you perform? \_\_\_\_\_  
Place of work \_\_\_\_\_  
Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Gender: Male                  Female  
Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Place of residence \_\_\_\_\_  
How many siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_\_  
Birth order \_\_\_\_\_  
What are you siblings' education levels? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are your parents still alive? Yes                  No  
Do you live with your parents? Yes                  No  
What are your parents' occupations? \_\_\_\_\_  
What are your parents' education levels? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are you attending school now? Yes                  No  
What grade are you in now? \_\_\_\_\_  
What grade were you in when you last attended school? \_\_\_\_\_

### Nature of Work

Who do you work with?  
Alone    Group  
With parents    Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
How do you travel to and from work?  
Walk—alone, in groups, with relatives, friends or co-workers  
Motordop  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
How long is the travel to and from work? \_\_\_\_\_  
How long have you been working? \_\_\_\_\_  
Is this your first job? Yes                  No  
Do you plan to change your job? Yes                  No  
When? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
Boring? \_\_\_\_\_  
What caused you to work?  
Broken family    Single mother  
Orphan    Single Father  
Repay Family Debt    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you choose this work?  
 Easy to perform                      To take care of family  
 Easy to find                              No skill necessary  
 Good pay                                  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have a choice?    Yes        No  
 What do you like most about this job? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What do you dislike most about this job? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Who introduced you to this work?  
 Self    Facilitators/Intermediaries  
 Family or relatives                      Parent(s)  
 Friends                                      Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How many days per week do you work? \_\_\_\_\_  
 How many hours per day do you work? \_\_\_\_\_  
 How many hours per day do you rest? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Can you take a day off for illness?    Yes        No  
 Would you be fired for this?    Yes        No

What is (or what do you consider to be) your work safety protection equipment?  
 Shoes    A Krama (scarf)  
 Plastic gloves                              Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you had any working accidents?    Yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_    No  
 If you make mistakes at work, are you reprimanded?  
 Yes—by whom?                              Hit with hands  
 No    Hit with other instruments  
 Verbal scolding                              Salary deduction  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you earn?  
 Per day \_\_\_\_\_  
 Per week \_\_\_\_\_  
 Per month \_\_\_\_\_

Are you paid daily, weekly or monthly?  
 Who do you give the money to? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Do you save any money for the future?  
 Yes—how much?  
 No—why not?

Where do you save your money?  
 Home: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How much of your salary do you keep yourself? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What do you do with the money you keep? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Have you ever been robbed of your money?    Yes        No  
 If yes, when and how much did you lose? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Did you know the thieves?    Yes        No  
 Have you been a victim of any other crime?  
 Verbal threats  
 Assault/Battery  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Health**

When was the last time you were sick? \_\_\_\_\_

What did you have?

Cold/Flu

Stomachache

Fever

Headache

Do you receive medical help when you are sick?

Family or traditional medicine

Purchase medicine from the market/pharmacy

Clinics or Private Doctors

Public hospitals

**Encounters with Authority**

When was the last time you had an encounter with the authority?

Village leader

Police/Gendarmerie

Commune leader

Other: \_\_\_\_

What was the reason for the encounter? \_\_\_\_\_

**Source of Assistance**

When you need help, who do you think will be able to help you?

Your parents

Your work colleagues

Your aunts or uncles

Your neighbors

Your grandparents

The village chief

Your teachers

An NGO

Other: \_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 2

### International Instruments and Conventions Ratified by the Government of Cambodia

<b>Instruments &amp; Conventions</b>	<b>Effective Date</b>	<b>Ratification Date</b>
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	02-09-1990	October 15, 1992
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict	12-02-2002	Signed June 27, 2000
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	18-01-2002	May 30, 2002
ILO Convention 29 on Forced Labor (1930)	01-05-1932	February 24, 1969
ILO Convention 006 on Night Work of Young Persons (1919)	13-06-1921	February 24, 1969
ILO Convention 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labor (1957)	17-01-1959	August 23, 1999
ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age (1973)	19-06-1976	August 23, 1999